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Museum of Fine Arts Bulletin

Published Bi-monthly. Subscription price, 50 cents per year postpaid. Single copies, 10 cents
Entered July 2, 1903, at Boston, Mass., as Second-Class Matter, under Act of Congress of July 16, 1894

VOL. XIV

BOSTON, OCTOBER, 1916

No. 85



The Miracles of St. Claudius

Flemish, about 1500

Lent by Mr. George Robert White

A Flemish Tapestry

MUCH has been written of the wonderful tapestries which belonged to the collection of the late J. Pierpont Morgan, and those who have known them in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York will learn with pleasure that, through the courtesy of Mr. George Robert White, one of the finest of that famous collection is now on exhibition in the Gothic Room of this Museum.

Mr. White's tapestry, illustrating the miracle of St. Claudius, is one of those that for four hundred years decorated the walls of Knole House, the

property in the sixteenth century of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the King of England, and later of the descendants of Thomas Sackville, cousin of Queen Elizabeth, to whom she gave it in 1537.

The Miracle of St. Claudius was woven in Flanders at about 1500, the time when Margaret of Austria, aunt and guardian of the young emperor, Charles V, was regent of the Netherlands. Margaret was a great patron of tapestry, and during her rule were woven some of the most beautiful pieces that have come down to us. Flemish artists were studying in Italy, and though their work was not so

natural and spontaneous as formerly, it had gained much in grace.

That the designer of this tapestry had been to Italy is shown plainly by the faces, figures, and costumes, and that he loved and studied natural as well as human forms is clear from the exquisite violets, myrtle, daisies, foxgloves, carnations, and strawberries with which he has decorated the foreground, and by the sprays of deep pink roses, calendulæ, and grapes in the border. The weaver, intent upon doing justice to this beautiful design, was liberal in his use of silk and gold, and this, as well as an unusual amount of white, deep pinks, and reds, gives a lightness and delicacy of color not common in tapestries of that date.

St. Claudius, two of whose miracles form the subject of this tapestry, was a saint greatly revered in his day. He was Bishop of Besançon in France, but desiring more opportunity for spiritual contemplation he embraced the monastic life. The tapestry displays two miracles of resurrection: below, that of two brothers drowned in a stream; above, that of a boy drowned in a spring. It is easy to recognize the two brothers falling into the moat, and again standing upon the surface of the waters, and although the designer has not labeled the other characters, as was frequently done by earlier and even contemporary artists, we have no difficulty in identifying the parents kneeling in supplication. The saint is more difficult to distinguish. Possibly his is the standing figure with a scoll in his right hand behind the father, and though somewhat differently clothed, he is probably the man with his hand on the key of the gate that controlled the waters. The only other important and unidentified figure wears a crown, sceptre and regal robes. That this should be only a king who witnessed the miracle seems improbable from his gesture, which suggests that he has had some part in the working of it. He stands much as Moses does in the tapestry of the Crossing of the Red Sea, calling attention to God's work. Possibly this is meant to represent the Lord God Himself, with whom St. Claudius interceded for the lives of the children. It was not uncommon at the time that this tapestry was woven to picture the Deity with crown and sceptre and priestly or royal robes. Another example in this Museum of such a representation is the figure of God the Father in the tapestry of the Apostles' Creed. The figures in the second miracle are smaller. The same kingly personage stands in the midst of a group of men. One of these is similar in appearance to the man below that we have called St. Claudius. In this group, also, is the holy nun, at whose suggestion the good offices of St. Claudius were invoked, and the traveler carrying the child whose lifeless body he has found on a rock in the spring at which he had stopped to refresh himself. Across the water the mother lifts up her hands with joy at the recovery of her child.

S. G. F.



Portrait of Marciana

About 100 A. D.

A Portrait of Marciana

THE marble head here illustrated by two photographs has recently been added to the Museum's Classical Collections as a purchase from the Arthur Knapp Fund, and is shown temporarily in a niche at the top of the main staircase leading to the Rotunda. It is a portrait of a Roman lady who lived in the reign of Trajan (98-117 A. D.), for her hair is dressed in the elaborate coiffure affected by the emperor's sister, Marciana, and her daughter Matidia.

The head is carved life-size in white marble of fine grain. The end of the nose is broken off and the lips are slightly injured, but otherwise the surface is in unusually fine preservation, with a uniform patina of a warm, ivory tone. It is thus still possible to appreciate to the full the insight and perfect technique of the unknown artist who produced this masterpiece of Trajanic portraiture. The features are rendered with literal fidelity, showing no trace of idealization or of striving for dramatic effect. And the result is a very intimate and living portrait of a middle-aged woman of simple, forceful character,



Coin of Marciana